



## Review of 'Food + the City'

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## FOOD + THE CITY

Edited by Karen A Franck

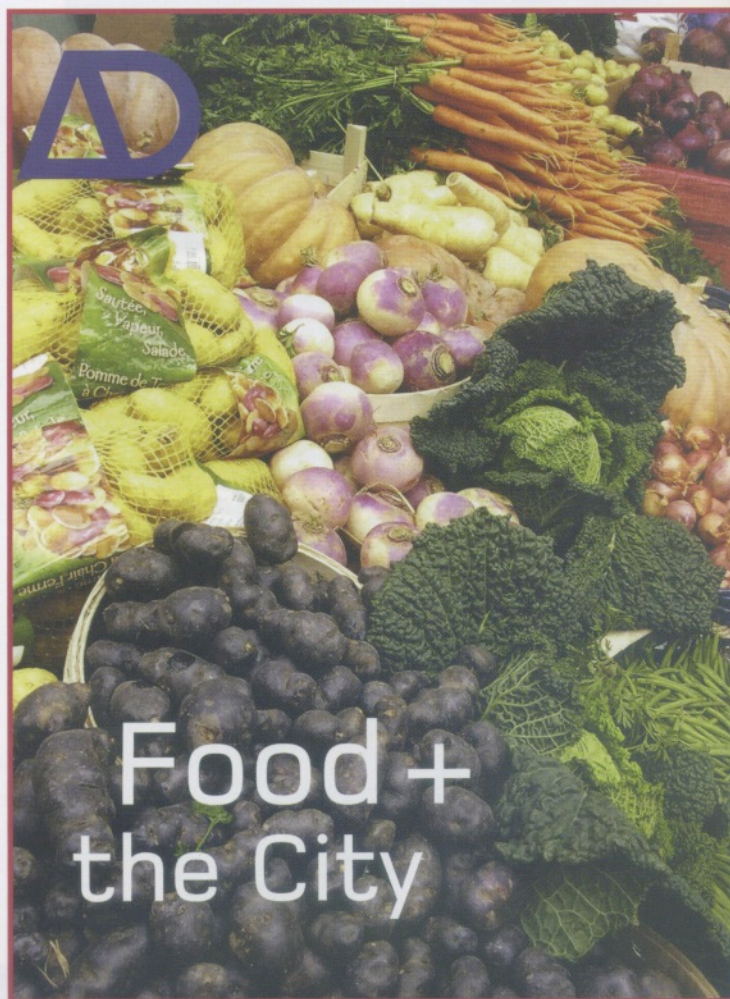
• 86

At a recent student review the project model (a celebrity chef's house) was presented to the panel made completely out of pasta – fine layers of lasagne to be precise. Architecture had become the ultimate 'consumable'. While Marinetti may have approved of such a gesture, this relationship between architecture and food is so fundamental that it not only determines our own personal survival but maintains the delicate balance of our whole urban ecology.

'Food + the City' explores this symbiotic relationship. It places food at the forefront of social, political and economic change and discusses the role of the city as "...dining room, market and farm." Trace back the evolution of any city and central to its development will be the means to facilitate the production, distribution and consumption of food. Alienated as we are, wondering through our vast urban supermarkets with their sanitized environments, we have become blind to shelves filled with 'food' shrouded in multiple layers of plastic and embalmed in chemicals. Flown thousands of miles into a seasonless and senseless global marketplace, few people now know or care where their food comes from.

This 'slim' publication is structured into twelve case studies that awaken our perceptions. It explores the qualities of different locations, eating habits, markets, typologies and researches into our urban nosh.

'Raw, Medium and Well Done' by Rachel Hirst and Jane Lawrence provides a typological reading of



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Australian eating-places. Using a structuralist methodology, they conclude that a cross-cultural blend of raw (street vendors) and well-done (up-market restaurants) -like the combination of a fresh salad and a steak- induces the best conditions for a successful gastro-urbanism.

The 'sensoryscapes' of Little Italy and Chinatown in New York are carefully described by Nisha Fernando and evoke a stark contrast to our bland supermarket culture. These two 'gastro-enclaves' are vibrant markets where people bargain as a way of life, where smells fill the air, and where the food is diverse, colourful and enjoyed on the street.

In Japan the seasons are celebrated with food gifts from 'Depa – chinka' (the food halls of large department stores). Amidst the intense urban environments of Japan these food

halls remain important producers of fine foods and delicacies. While our food is ghettoised into the ridiculous themed areas of shopping malls, in Japan the department stores thrive on exquisite displays and freshness that support age-old rituals and customs.

In 'Food for the City, Food in the City', Karen Franck criticises the modernist tendency to zone the city. In so doing, the production, movement and enjoyment of food are rendered invisible. From the huge transportation systems needed to facilitate movement –there is one truck for every 15 people in America- to the mountains of packaging waste, we have induced our own unsustainable urban indigestion.

Looking to Farmers markets, food buying clubs and CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture) Franck illustrates a number of alternative ▶







In Hong Kong, its densely populated area is supported by 45% of its own 'urban' produce. The 'Daipaidongs' (big licence stalls) turn the city into a continuous dining room with over 30,000 places to eat. But new planning laws and development plans are eradicating them and moving them inside to achieve 'higher' conditions of air conditioning and hygiene. In so doing, they are erasing the very qualities that make Hong Kong so distinctive.

David Bell discusses how in Manchester after the 1996 bomb there has been a huge increase in 'posh nosh'. Aware of the danger of the 'gentrification' of food they have managed in the Northern Quarter to hold onto the richness of so called 'high' and 'low' eateries, cheek by jowl.

As well as older urban areas developing as 'Gastronomic Quarters', Grand Central Station in New York (we are told) can be read as a layered 'Gastro-Status' building. A slice through it reveals the order: from the upper balconies (the place to be and be seen) we drop through the successive floor 'plates' to the depths of the station's underbelly and the unforgettable Oyster Bar in its darkened catacombs. The city can be savoured vertically as well as horizontally.

While for its price this is no 'super-size-me' publication, it does offer some nutritious ideas, and with its extensive 'gastro tour' exposes our hunger for a richer and more sustaining urban menu. ●

**Paul Clarke**

**Food + the City**

**Edited by Karen A Franck**

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► ways to refocus production and consumption back to a local level and one not dependant on distance. While some farmers markets have struggled to survive against the commercial pressures of huge supermarket conglomerates, the transformation of schoolyards into 'fruit and veg yards' has had significantly more "... social, economic and health consequences." Opening up redundant and underused space in schools to the whole community has turned tarmac into tomatoes. Over a thousand of these projects are now well established across America.

There are echoes of the allotment movement. The blockades of the First and Second World Wars necessitated a local production system in Britain where an indigenous urban output of food was developed interdependent of agriculture. Only with the rise of supermarkets was that potential abandoned. But now urban allotments are once again popular. No longer just an historical consolation to rural migrant workers but an active part of a 'continuous productive urban landscape'. This inter-layering of productive land and the city -as predicted by Frank Lloyd Wright in Broadacre City- is perhaps one of the most useful strategies for our time and is perhaps echoed in Asia's intense modernisation where the rice field exists next to the skyscraper.